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Lonnie Burt

Education Committee

**HB 6842: An Act Concerning the Establishment of a Local Food for Schools Incentive Program and Expansion of The CT Grown for CT Kids Grants Program**

Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, and Connecticut General Assembly members of the Education Committee, my name is Lonnie Burt, and I am the Director of the Child Nutrition Programs for Hartford Public Schools. I have been in Hartford since 2004 and a Child Nutrition Director since 1987. I am also a Registered Dietitian, and a resident of West Hartford, Connecticut. I am writing to ask for your support on HB 6842: An Act Concerning the Establishment of a Local Food for Schools Incentive Program and Expansion of The CT Grown for CT Kids Grants Program.

The overall goal of our program in Hartford and all Child Nutrition Programs throughout Connecticut is to support academic learning and improve health outcomes of our students by increasing consumption of nutrient dense foods especially fruits and vegetables. This legislation will help districts meet these goals. Participating in a Farm to School program and providing students access to locally grown produce has many positive outcomes. Anecdotally, I have consistently witnessed throughout my career students who consume more produce when they know it is local. Purchasing local foods decreases the carbon footprint and has a positive impact on the local economy. Local produce has a higher nutrient content because it is consumed closer to harvest date due to shorter storage and travel times. Unfortunately, there are barriers to providing local foods in school meal programs, especially produce. It is challenging to get the quantities and variety needed, especially in the larger districts. Identifying growers and overcoming the distribution and delivery obstacles is another challenge. This legislation addresses a number of barriers school districts face in accessing locally grown food and builds the capacity for CSDE to provide districts with the technical assistance needed to be successful.

In Hartford, we have prioritized our partnership with Knox and Keney Park Sustainability Project to not only increase culturally relevant local produce offerings on our menus and increase consumption, but to also create more opportunities for urban growers to have an economic avenue in the school meal program. We have been able to work with the growers to plant crops specific to our menu needs. It is a benefit to everyone involved, especially our students who are not only exposed to local produce items but also to local people who are successful growers. Items such as callaloo, collard greens, and swiss chard have been grown and served right in Hartford. We have also made sofrito from local ingredients and froze it for the winter months to use in our Arroz con Gandules recipe. Purchasing local foods also promotes social, geographic, and racial equity.

*"Every Child Thrives. Every School is High Performing. No Exceptions."*



Where the future is present.

The CT Grown for CT Kids Grants have helped re-establish the greenhouse at Hartford Public High School. The grant not only funded the necessary materials for a hydroponic growing system; it also included developing a chemistry and botany curriculum, a nutrition component, and a partnership with Keney Park Sustainability Project. Students are participating in hands-on learning experiences learning how food grows and making the connection between food consumption and health. Research shows that students who participate in hands-on learning activities such as gardening increases fruit and vegetable consumption 3 times more than students who do not participate in hands-on learning activities.

Now, more than ever, we understand just how essential schools are for supporting student wellness. Providing schools with the resources they need to increase access to meals, start up or expand local food sourcing and education activities is a victory for our kids, our schools, and our communities. I urge you to support this legislation to help Connecticut students and schools to grow and thrive.

Thank you for your time and for your service.

Respectfully,

Lonnie M. Burt, MS, RD, CD-N  
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